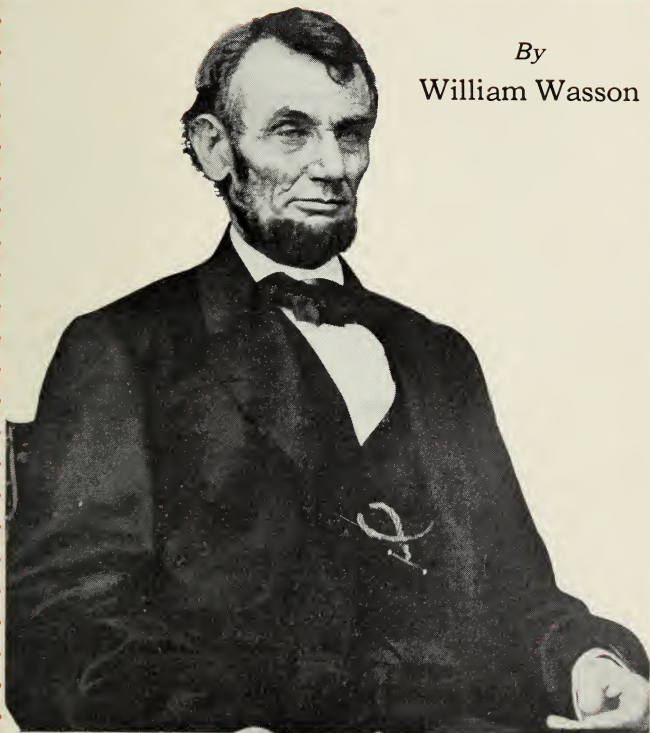


LINCOLN

Captain Cummings' Recollections of "Honest Abe"

By
William Wasson



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It would be a gracious expression to remember some sick friend, some shut-in, some going-away friend, some friend you want to send a kindly remembrance to, with a Novelette to help pass the time. In place of a card, why not an interesting story when your friend's anniversary day rolls around?

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THE CAPTAIN'S
Recollections
 of "Honest Abe"

Part I

SO you boys want to know if I ever knew Abraham Lincoln. Why, I knew Abraham, or “Honest Abe” as all we that knew him always called him,—and who did not know Lincoln for miles around. I remember him from the time he came to Springfield, way back in 1837, until that eventful day came when we sorrowfully laid

Springfield, Feb 14th 1844—
Friend Richard:

I am sorry to have to say I can find but one copy of President's Messages in town, and that one belongs to the State Library, and, of course, cannot be had— If alive and well, I am sure to be with you on the 22nd. I will meet the ties of mighty adversaries— you mention, in the best manner I can. No news here—

R. S. Thomas

Yours forever,

A. Lincoln

Virginia, Ills

Facsimile of letter Lincoln wrote in 1844

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and attractive, I tell you. All the young fellows like Stephen Douglas started to court her, but she had set her cap for Lincoln, for she was an ambitious girl and had faith that Abe would go far. Lincoln was charmed with her wit and beauty. They became engaged sometime in 1840 and agreed to be married on the first of January 1841.

But a funny thing happened on the day set for the wedding. The house was all decorated, the supper prepared, the guests all there and ready to watch the ceremony. Mary was in her wedding dress and veil, and I can see her now as she sat there, nervously waiting for the groom. Lincoln was late. An hour passed—the bride became frantic. All of the guests became mighty restless. Where in the world was Abe? After another hour some of us went out to find him. But nobody did, and so the

The Captain Continues

His Reminiscences of "Honest Abe"

*From the time Lincoln became President
until his death*

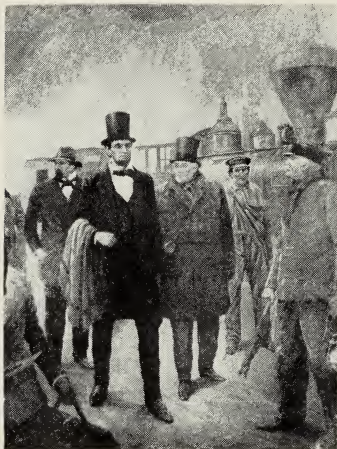
Part II

I DID not go with Lincoln to Washington but I heard all about his journey from the time he left Springfield until he arrived in Washington, from my friend Col. Ward Hill Lamon, who accompanied him.

The journey took two weeks. You see, everybody wanted to hear and see Lincoln, so they stopped at many places besides the ones advertised where the train would stop. Old Abe would go out on the back platform and speak to the people, who always came in crowds.

The first stop was Indianapolis, where they stayed all night at the Bates House. The next day, his 52nd birthday, they went to Cincinnati. The weather was fine and there was a great parade, the streets were all decorated. You see, Cincinnati was on the Ohio River and just across was Kentucky. Here the feeling about slavery was divided and a great many people on both sides came over to hear Old Abe.

From Cincinnati he went to Columbus, spending the night at the home of the Governor, and spoke to the



*Lincoln arriving in Washington
over the Baltimore & Ohio R. R.
to take the oath of office*

General Assembly. The house was packed to the doors. He next went to Pittsburgh and Cleveland. He then spoke in Buffalo. Col. Lamont sent me a copy of the *New York Herald* of Sunday, February 17, 1861, telling me about it. I clipped the article and pasted it in my scrapbook. Here it is:

“At the North East Station a flag inscribed, ‘Fort

Sumter’ was carried right up to where Mr. Lincoln stood, but he did not seem to take the hint, and made no allusion to it in his few remarks. Mr. Lincoln said that during the campaign he had received a letter from a young girl of Buffalo, suggesting that he let his whiskers grow, as she knew it would improve his looks; and he laughingly said he was in favor of anything that would help him out, and if his fair correspondent was among the crowd he would be glad to welcome her. In response, a little lassie made her way through the crowd and was helped to the platform and kissed by the President, amid the shouts of the crowd.”

Well boys, you know now, how Old Abe came to wear his whiskers.

The next stop was at Albany, N. Y., the Capital, and he was here greeted by Governor Morgan and the prominent officials who had come to see and hear him from all over the State.

The day Lincoln was at Albany, which was February 18th, Jefferson Davis was inaugurated President of the Confederate States of America at Montgomery, Alabama. From Albany he went to New York and then to Trenton, New Jersey, to address the State Legislature.

When Lincoln was in Philadelphia he visited Independence Hall, and raised a flag over the building where the Declaration of Independence was signed. Here at Philadelphia he first heard of a plot to assassinate him on his way to Washington.

Old Abe referred to this plot in his speech at Philadelphia:

“I never had a feeling politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence originated and given to the world from this hall. A sentiment in the Declaration which gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but, I hope, to the world, for all future time.”

“If this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say, I would rather be assassinated on the spot, than to surrender it.”

“I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by.”

A funny thing happened to Old Abe on that trip that

[illegible]

when he finished. He used the same simple words he always used and said just what he meant, so that everyone could understand. As one newspaper said, "He used the language of common sense and words that exactly fitted the facts."

I kept a copy of his speech in my scrapbook. Lincoln said:

"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it now exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so."

“I hold in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of the states is perpetual. I therefore consider that in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken, and to the extent of my ability I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the states.”

“The power confided to me will be used to hold, and occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government. We cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other and, my Countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time, before you, in hot haste, take a step which you would never take deliberately.”

It seemed as if Old Abe had hardly gotten a place to hang his hat, before his troubles started. You see, hostilities had really begun before Lincoln was inaugurated.

A black and white photograph showing a man seated at a small table inside a large, dark tent. The man is wearing a dark jacket and is looking towards the right. On the table in front of him are several items, including what appears to be a bottle and some papers. In the background, another person is partially visible, standing near the tent's entrance. The tent's interior is dimly lit, with light coming from the entrance area. The overall scene suggests a field or expedition setting.

President Lincoln at the Headquarters of General McClellan

I started one time to keep an account of the number of telegrams he sent to the various officers, ordering them not to shoot some poor fellow who had been court-martialed for falling asleep at his post, or for some other reason, but I lost track of them, there were so many.

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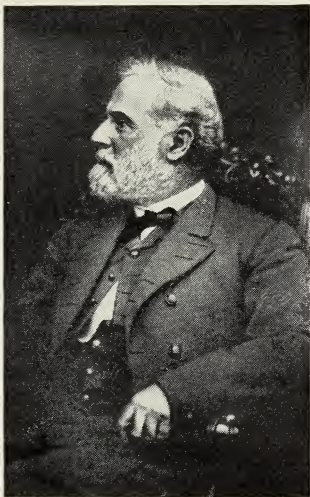
*A view of the field hospital at Culp's Hill,
during the Battle of Gettysburg*

minute; he kept pounding away at them. Their losses were many and Lee had no more man power to draw on. They were just about at the end of their resources. But their spirit was immense. I tell you the South should always be proud of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia.

Well, the Johnnies, as we called those Southern fellows, retreated to Appomattox Court House, which was not far from Petersburg, determined to make a final last stand, but Grant and his Army were just too much for them.

I was told to catch up with Grant and give him some orders and letters that Old Abe wanted him to have. Lincoln felt that the end was coming and I guess he wanted Grant to be easy with them about the terms of surrender.

I was at Grant's Headquarters, when an officer bearing a white flag of truce, was sent to Grant about 11 o'clock in the morning and then Lee and Grant met about midway between the lines and stood and talked in



General Robert E. Lee

the horses. Can you help us out by sending some over?"

"Will 25,000 rations and other things help you out?"

"Plenty, plenty, that will be more than abundance," Lee replied.

After Lee had offered General Grant his sword as a sign of surrender, which Grant with a wave of his hand refused to accept, we all shook hands and said good-bye and each side returned to their headquarters.

That day stands out in my life as a red-letter day. When I saw those quiet, courageous men, having known each other in happier days, each with a great respect for the other's ability, quietly discussing the terms of surrender that brought to a close four terrible bloody, war-torn years, I said to myself, "There are two really great Americans."

General Meade met Lee as he was riding off. Lee who used to know Meade, did not recognize him. Meade said, "Don't you remember me General Lee, I'm George Meade." Lee replied, "No, I did not know you, Meade," and, glancing at his gray hair and beard, "How did you happen to get all those gray hairs?" to which Meade replied, "I'm afraid you're the cause of most of them." They laughed and rode off.

The war was over. Back in Washington, bands were playing, bells were ringing, cannons booming, flags flying, people were marching and hurraing. Nobody paid any attention to business. Every man who could make a speech, was holding forth. Secretary of War Stanton immediately suspended the draft and stopped purchasing military supplies. I tell you it was a happy day for everybody. Crowds were singing,

"When Johnnie Comes Marching Home Again,
Hurrah, Hurrah."



obscurity, raised to supreme command at a supreme moment, and intrusted with the destiny of a nation."

Now comes that part of my story that I never like to talk much about. It brings too many sad memories — that night at Ford's Theater.

The play, "Our American Cousin," with Laura Keane and her company was at Ford's Theater. As Old

Abe always enjoyed seeing a good play, he often went.

The management had announced in the papers that the President and his party would attend that night's performance, so the place was packed to the doors with a happy and admiring crowd of citizens, neighbors and friends. Everybody was in good spirits, bent on enjoying themselves and celebrating the end of the war.

When the President and his party entered the box, the music struck up—everybody stood up, clapping their hands and cheering, the women waving their handkerchiefs. Old Abe stood up and waved his hands to the audience. It took several minutes for the crowd to quiet



The Lincoln Home in Springfield, Ill., where he lived and from which he was buried. Showing the Guard of Honor that accompanied the funeral train from Washington

arms and found the blood trickling down her dress. Then we knew he had been cowardly shot from the back by the assassin, who had quietly opened the box door when the house was dark.

They got a barn door from somewhere and we carried him down the stairs and into a house across the street and laid him on a bed in a small room at the end of the hall.

Awe-stricken and unable to do anything we stood by his bed; Stanton and other cabinet officers, generals and a few old friends like myself. Mrs. Lincoln and Robert were in an adjoining room.

Through the long night the heavy breathing and

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